



Public Diplomacy UPDATE

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President Bush Hosts Iftar

“America is a land of many faiths, and we welcome and honor the Muslim faith in our nation,” said President Bush at the White House iftar October 16. The President’s guests included a Muslim paramedic and police officers from New York City who helped rescue survivors on September 11, 2001, as well as American Muslims who serve in the U.S. military and foreign service.

“America is a more hopeful nation because of the talents and generosity and compassion of our Muslim citizens,” President Bush said.

The President described Islam as a religion that transcends race and ethnicity, bringing hope and comfort to over a billion people worldwide. ■



President Bush shakes hands with Imam Talal Eid of the Islamic Institute of Boston, during the White House Iftar on October 16, 2006. (© AP Images)



Eid Mubarak!

On the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, I send you my warmest wishes for a Happy Eid. Eid al-Fitr is an annual celebration of the achievement of enhanced piety, understanding, and forgiveness. It is also a time for Muslims to celebrate the end of fasting and the opportunity to thank God for His help and strength to practice self control and discipline during the month of Ramadan.

As Muslims across the world celebrate Eid, I want to share with you some thoughts and images from American events during the Holy Month of Ramadan. Islam is a part of America, and our country is proud to have millions of Muslim American citizens who worship proudly and freely and are part of the rich fabric of our country. America’s tradition of diversity, respect and understanding is strengthened by the different faiths of our citizens.

During this Ramadan, our President and members of his Cabinet invited American Muslims to break the fast at iftars throughout our nation’s capital — from the White House to the Department of State to the Department of Treasury. America’s Ambassadors around the world from Paris to Pakistan hosted iftar dinners for local Muslims. And across the United States in mosques, community centers and private homes, American citizens gathered for iftars — inviting not just Muslims but Americans of other faiths to come together to learn more about Islam and to break bread together.

I attended a warm and wonderful iftar at a private home in Virginia, whose hosts invited a couple of hundred Muslim, Christian and Jewish professionals to talk about the importance of dialogue and understanding. Together we broke the fast and shared stories, learned more about each other, and celebrated the fundamental rights we cherish: freedom, justice and respect for all.

May you and your families have a blessed Eid.

—Karen P. Hughes

Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs

U.S. Embassy Reaches Out to Those in Need

The U.S. Embassy in Nicosia joined forces with the local Red Crescent society to host iftar dinners on October 17 and 18 in north Nicosia and in Famagusta — the two largest cities in Cyprus’ Muslim north. The dinners served about 1,000 of the communities’ neediest people as well as day laborers and university students.

The dinner was served by Embassy staff and family members. Counselor for Public Affairs Thomas Miller, joined by local officials and Red Crescent representatives, reiterated President Bush’s message that the U.S. is proud to have many Muslims among its citizenry.

“Ramadan and the upcoming holiday seasons are a good time to remember the common values that bind us together. Our society is enriched by our Muslim citizens whose commitment to faith reminds us of the gift of religious freedom in our country,” President Bush said in his greetings to Muslims celebrating Ramadan. ■





U.S. Mosques Use Iftars To Build Interfaith Understanding

Islamic centers across the United States view Ramadan iftars as an opportunity to reach out to non-Muslims and build bridges of understanding through interfaith dialogue.

“We have always had to do interfaith in America. That’s nothing new for America,” Muslim Community Center (MCC) member Tiye Mulazim said at an October 17 iftar in Virginia.

MCC has held iftars for local educators, government officials and neighborhood Christians and Jews.

Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat said the events are “a wonderful example that people want to talk. We have to extend invitations to others, and they will come.”

Americans of other faiths are reaching out to Muslims, too. Under Secretary of State R. Nicholas Burns observed to guests assembled for an October 18 iftar at the State Department in Washington that “there are millions of Muslims in this country and they worship at over 1,200 mosques. . . . We thank the Muslim community in our country for teaching us about the great religion of Islam. . . . We know that as we sit together tonight from our different backgrounds we share a common faith and that faith is in the future. And the future must be built on tolerance and on peace.” ■

“[F]or people of all faiths, [Ramadan] is a good time to reflect on the values we hold in common, including love of family, gratitude to God, the importance of community, and a commitment to tolerance and religious freedom.”

— President George W. Bush, October 16

Young Muslims in U.S. Observe Ramadan on University Campuses



Muslim students attending universities in the United States are able to practice their faith away from home, and many young people observe Ramadan even more strictly on their own.

Attending iftar dinners on campus is a way for Muslim students to connect with other Muslims and to reaffirm their commitment to their faith.

Harvard freshman Asli Bashir enjoys iftar dinners on campus because they bring Muslims together. When she is unable to attend the Harvard Islamic Society iftar dinners, she sits and waits among her non-Muslim peers at the freshman dining hall for the exact moment when she is permitted to eat. Her friends help distract her by asking her questions about Ramadan.

“My parents aren’t calling me and asking if I am fasting. Nobody on campus is checking in on me to see if I’m fasting,” Na’eel Cajee said. “When you make the choice yourself, it makes it more meaningful.”

At American University in Washington, faculty members are encouraged to refrain from administering exams during Ramadan or to offer them early in the day rather than in the afternoon. ■



American Muslims Prepare for Eid-al-Fitr

When American Muslims celebrate Eid-al-Fitr they observe the same religious traditions familiar to Muslims around the world, but celebrate in a distinctly American way, as people from diverse national and cultural backgrounds come together to share the feast.

Most families observe the same general Eid customs of going to the mosque after sunrise. “Before anything we offer zakat,” said Moroccan-American Saad. In America, this is customarily done through the mosque. Then special Eid prayers are said. Usually, on Eid-al-Fitr, the faithful pray in a large group in the mosque, outdoors or in some other venue where an imam will give a sermon. The Ramadan fast is broken with sweets. Everyone wears new clothes — especially children are dressed in bright, new outfits.

In the hectic pace of daily life, Muslim Americans have the same difficulty meeting their friends socially as do most hard-working Americans. Consequently, Hossain identifies one of the greatest joys of Eid saying, “You meet a lot of people you haven’t seen in a long time.” ■

For more images and stories of Muslim life in America, go to http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/life_and_culture.html